DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 061 PS 024 831

AUTHOR Margolin, Edythe
TITLE Self-Discovery and Professional Development.
PUB DATE Nov 96
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Dallas, TX, November 22, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Career Choice; Caregivers; *College Students; Course Selection (Students); Higher Education; Individual Development; *Professional Development; Self Actualization; *Self Concept; Self Esteem; Self Evaluation (Individuals); Teacher Education; Values Clarification

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of self discovery in the early stages of caregiver professional development, with a focus on the array of choices available to university students. The assumption is that many people do not know their repertoire of skills until asked to complete a project requiring those skills; thus, "the heart of becoming a professional involves gestation of self-development as an adult." It is necessary that students be given a wide variety and levels of information so they can recognize where their own inner linkages seem to connect with various professions. Until students identify their professional choices, they are not comfortable or confident in planning their academic programs. Students should continue the search for professional development because it: (1) promotes exploration; (2) stimulates creativity; (3) promote self-awareness; (4) energizes activity; (5) increases self-testing; (6) creates open-mindedness; (7) affects positive mental health; (8) sharpens decision-making; and (9) increases self-respect and self-confidence. Professional development can begin at any age and should begin when the individual senses that it is the right time. (KDFB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 402 061

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Dr. Edythe Margolin
California State University,
Northridge, California

November, 1996
NAEYC Conference

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Edythe Margolin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

"Self-Discovery and Professional Development"

I. Introduction

Professional development, for the most part, is similar to finding our way in a semi-darkened room. We can see shapes and forms that allow us some markers to avoid bumping into things, but we are not really sure where our footsteps will take us. Some of us know clearly when we are in our teens or young adult years exactly what we want to do for our future work. Will it be with children, adolescents, parents? In what capacity do we want to work with children, families or schools?

For those of us who know what we expect to do when we graduate from a university or college, the paths to get there are relatively clear. But for many of us who are not sure--and it depends a great deal on how old we are and what our life is like when we start our professional careers-- our choices are less set in our minds. Just as a light turned on in a room can help us see where we are going, so it is that a psychological and emotional brightness and clarity can help us direct our selected paths.

This paper focuses not only on the **directions and paths** to get us where we want to go, but more important, it points to an **array of choices** of which many people are not aware are available to them. Students who attend the university are often in a quandary. They know they want to work with children or youth, but they do not know how or where or in what capacity they want to do it.

If an individual has had experience with children by having them or by taking care of someone else's child, or has worked in a camp or playground, he or she has some concepts about their behavior and what can be expected of them at certain ages. If an individual has a relative who has needed special education because of being disabled emotionally, physically, or cognitively, she or he often chooses to take courses leading to a degree in that field. Various experiences with one's own or other people's children do give an individual some impressions as to what they might have to do if they become responsible professionally for children.

PS 024831

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

All too often, students are not really aware of their own resources, creativity, and abilities. One would expect that by the time students come to a university, they know what their strengths in subject matter are. Oddly enough, many are not. They have not been told that they were good writers, when they submitted an excellent paper, for example. They have not been told that they have unusual and praiseworthy ideas. In some cases, they seem to carry with them the memories of critical family members who did not recognize their skills. Basic to this paper is the notion that since many of us **do not know our repertoire of skills** until we are asked to do a project that brings them out in us, the heart of becoming a professional involves gestation of self-development as an adult.

II. The Search for Our Own Identity and Productivity As If We Were Strangers To Ourselves

Students who come to the various child development programs or to those in early childhood education may start out working with young children in a child development center, a preschool, a kindergarten, or a child care center. A child-care license may be needed, a teaching credential may be needed, or a four-year degree may be needed. In any case, the student has some idea about wanting to teach and work with young children. In an **interdisciplinary** child development major, however, all students are not coming to the program to acquire a teaching credential. Some of them want to work one-on-one with children in a tutoring situation. Some of them want to be a counselor or work with children in a hospital. They may want to work with small groups of children and not be in charge of an entire classroom of 25 or 30 children as they might need to do in an elementary school.

Until the student discovers where he or she want to work (e.g., a playground, a residential care home, a court of law involving children) the student does a great deal of serious soul-searching. It is necessary, therefore, that students be given a wide variety and levels of information so that they can recognize where their own inner linkages seem to connect with the outside world and its various professions.

When presenting the array of choices that students can have, the advisor or counselor watches the students' faces. It is easy to see what strikes a chord within them. Some students will smile and say, "That's it! That's what I want to do!" The significant aspect of this expression on their part is that they **were not aware that the choice was a possibility for them.**

Counselors and professors can do a tremendous service to students by letting them know of the many opportunities that can be cultivated in the professions. They need to sense that strong inner push toward one or two professions. Until they make those choices, they are not very comfortable or confident in planning their programs. After all, it cost them money, time, and great energy to fulfill what is needed to achieve a degree and/or a credential or license to work with children and youth.

Some students have to obtain a loan to pursue a college degree or license. Some seek financial aid from the university. Young mothers have to make arrangements for their children to be in day care or have someone come to their homes. Even while they are being advised regarding the courses they will need, it is obvious they are concerned about money or child care or coordinating time outside of school with their programs. The anxiety is obvious.

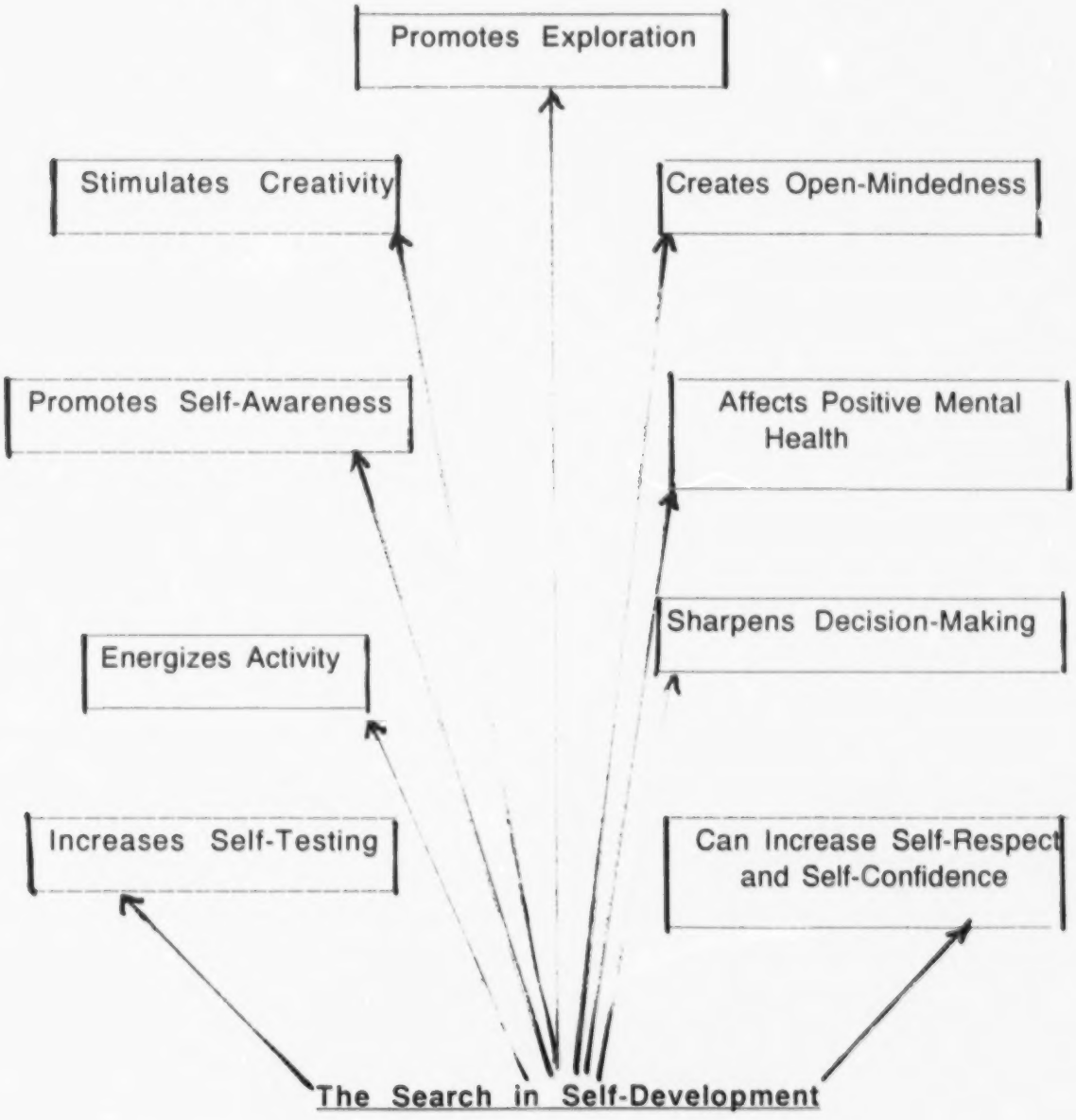
III. The Pursuit for Professional Development

There are at least nine reasons why it is wise to continue the search for professional development. The characteristics that it promotes in one's personality are helpful in realizing what one's own inner resources are. Students who are the first ones in their family to attend college and receive a degree, are often very self-effacing and unsure of themselves. The uncertainty along the way is related to: a) not knowing what opportunities are "out there" in society until one begins to ask questions, and b) not being aware that one has it within herself or himself to know and learn the necessary skills and abilities needed to be successful.

The first characteristic in the search for professional development is that it **promotes exploration.** The student becomes less self-conscious in seeking alternatives for what he or she wants. The focus is more on what

Dr. Edythe Margolin November, 1996

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SELF-DEVELOPMENT, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS



might be found than whether one is suited to the level of the job or capable enough to perform well in it. This quality of looking beyond oneself is very helpful in becoming what one wants. The exploratory mode, similar to research of the scientist, can enlarge one's perceptions of possibilities.

The second characteristic in the search for professional development is that it increases **self-testing**. As one proceeds toward the achievment of goals, periodic self-testing continues. The individual who is not sure of what is best or most appropriate for him or her is looking at what is the best fit. This suggests that people are ready for constructive comments and they do not shy away from ideas they may not have thought of prior to the search.

The third characteristic in the developmental search is that it can **increase self-respect and self-confidence**. For an individual to abandon for a while the need to be sure of every step and to be willing to risk unsure attempts toward the goal, requires a growing self-confidence. The self-respect emerges out of a new feeling that the self is becoming stronger in various ways. Goals can be set and goals can be achieved.

The fourth characteristic in one's professional development is that **activities are energized.** Nothing succeeds like success. The knowledge that we are working actively toward goals feeds the momentum along the way. We really do not want to stop. Our activities are purposeful while also being experimental at times. We have to remember that we are working toward a desired goal, yet all energies do not bring us to that exact spot we are seeking. We have to expect that zig-zags may occur along the way. Yet that does not deter our direction.

The fifth characteristic is that **decision-making processes are sharper**. We realize that we cannot remain too long in one phase or plateau. It does not mean that every decision will bring us rapidly to where we want to be, but it does mean that we become better organized with our eyes on the target. On the quest for our goal, we are attuned much more than we would usually be toward the need for making clearer decisions.

The sixth characteristic **promotes self-awareness** in the individual who is in the phases of professional development. The more aware one is of what one is doing and the way one is thinking, which is a process called *metacognition,* the better one knows oneself and one's tendencies to act. It is very helpful to be able to explain to someone, one's instructor, for example, why we think a certain decision is a better one for us. Typically, we can protect ourselves from larger errors when we realize what we are doing and why. This does not suggest that sometimes we may want to be impulsive and act without reason. Sometimes we act or respond to an offer intuitively, without being sure why we did, but simply that it seemed right at the time. However, when we search within in order to be aware of what we are doing, it pays off when we are making larger, long-term decisions which may have greater consequences in the long-run.

The seventh characteristic in the path toward professional development that can occur in our personality is **positive mental-health.** When we are actively involved toward a goal that is essential to our future and well-being, we have greater vitality and greater faith that we can reach that goal. Again, it does not mean that everything we do, as the *golden hand,* will be perfect and completely on target. It does mean that the process and active energy that are used to bring us to our eventual goal allows us to be patient.

Sometimes people will say that they think they can see the light at the end of the tunnel as they come closer to their goal. Another view might be that the **search provides and is the light**. An individual who is busy working toward a goal does not always expect to reach it in a short time. It takes time. It requires deferred satisfaction at times. It takes an inner faith that one will get there if one does not stop in the search. These energies and focus on the goal contribute to postive mental health even when the moments of temporary disappointment or set-backs may occur. The trust that builds up within itself and becomes stronger with each hurdle that the individual mounts and surpasses, serves the individual with greater strength in **not** wanting to give up. A positive outlook results from seeing the realities while gaining some of the successes. Success is not without trial, conflict, or uncertainty at times.

The eighth characteristic in one's search for professional development is the **stimulation of creativity.** When we truly want to accomplish a particular goal, we can become very creative. If one path does not work, we think of another. We ask others what has worked with them. We think of unusual ways to achieve what we need. We cut corners in one area, such as the amount of time we will give to recreation, to our friends, or to other aspects in our lives that have taken a great deal of time. It does not mean that these cuts in time with friends or recreation has to be done forever. At the time that we are concerned about a given goal, and we have already sacrificed money, energy, and other "commodities" in our lives, we need to concentrate on completing it. Our good friends will understand that diminished time with them is only temporary.

Creativity is a very valuable quality to develop within ourselves. It involves challenging the *status quo.* It involves looking at our present lives and habits, and thinking about what we can change in order to achieve our goal. It is a valuable quality when we help others -- children, adolescents or adults-- it frees the mind to dig deeper into our accustomed way of doing things. We begin to think of ways that we can make changes, not only within ourselves, but in the way we work with others. It is highly worthwhile to cultivate this habit and quality. In a sense it is a kind of periodic self-assessment, as well as an impetus pushing us to future accomplishments.

The ninth characteristic that can develop and be activated in the search for professional development is **open-mindedness.** Along the way in the search we develop a tentativeness in our thinking and action. For example, we may decide we want to go in one direction. We might hear about someone who used another idea. We decide we may try to do the same thing. It does not mean that we become wishy-washy in our behavior when we change our minds. It can mean that we gave more thought to our earlier goal and felt that it would be wise to try another way to proceed.

All the above characteristics that can affect our thinking, behavior, and action are very helpful in giving us the boost or support and spurts of energy that many of us need to move us toward where we want to go. These patterns can become a worthwhile habit, so that we continue in our lives to use the qualities we have learned in the process toward our goals.

IV. Starting When We Get the Stimulus

Our university sees many preschool teachers, who have taught for many years but do not have a four-year degree. They tell us they have the experience teaching children, but they would like to come back to the university to get the four-year degree. They also feel out-of-place taking classes with students who have not had the amount of teaching experience they have had. We also see young mothers who want to have a degree and credential so that they can be eligible for a job in a public elementary school. They hardly know where to begin. They almost don't know what questions they need to ask. They are very embarrassed. And for people who say, "I'm afraid I'll be too old by the time I finish my degree," it is very difficult to seek advice. Yet, they look as though they are only about 27 years old when they make that comment.

It is time to get on the path toward professional development **when WE OURSELVES sense it is the right time.** The doubts that we are filled with can be set aside. Yes, it often takes courage to embark on a plan that for several years will involve time, money and energy. And many of the students are responsible for other people in their lives outside of school. The decisions are not easy. Coordinating our lives with the outside world with the one in school is a challenging job. A potential student needs all the support he or she can get from anyone who is willing to help or to contribute ideas.

Sometimes the individual does not get the desired encouragement to fulfill the current decisions and the tasks that lie ahead. In any case, the delay begins. They block themselves from moving ahead in a positive direction thinking that they cannot do it. They will look for reasons to drop out. It is mainly when they reach a high point of frustration with their lives outside of school that they will return. They have sensed that some part of themselves was not being fulfilled.

As soon as a student does begin the professional path for development, they often remain on that path for longer than they had expected. Getting the confidence that their first college degree helped to give them, they are soon talking about the master's degree. The control they have learned to develop over their own lives and the future has become stronger than ever.

V. Looking Ahead

In the introduction of this paper, I compared the search for professional development to a semi-darkened room in which we needed to find our way very carefully. So it seems to be with what we need to do to become what we want to be or to fulfill our goals. Many students come to the child development program because they need to satsify a somewhat empty feeling they have.

The nine personality characteristics that were presented as deeply related to the quest for professional goals become the strong inner drive resulting in the momentum that energizes the student's work and activities. We are not sure how it happens, but it does. We have seen many grateful students who were happy to be shown the possibilities that were open to them. Nobody had to give them a sales talk. All they needed to know is that their deepest-felt desires could be linked with professional opportunities that were available to them.

For people who wanted to eventually start their own schools for children, or for people who wanted to work with children in the arts, courses were available, as were professors who could advise them. For students who wanted to become advocates for children or families in courts of law, there were field experiences available during the courses taken toward the bachelor's degree. These experiences were great opportunities to discover what students wanted or did not want to do in their professional capacities after they received the degree.

The wonderful fact about the search for identity and self-fulfillment is that for those of us who are teachers, our experiences can help us in guiding children. So many can benefit from our own knowledge. We can help them in being optimistic. We can help them in not giving up even when things become difficult for them. Martin E. P. Seligman's book, *Learned Optimism,* reports on his research showing how we can help ourselves by being more open to interpreting the experiences we have. We should not think of one unsuccessful experience as a damaging label to our whole personality--now and in the future. We should try to be accurate in evaluating the experience, but at the same time, not think of ourselves as failures.

As adults, our lives can be looked at in phases. Think of the way we thought when we were children; as adolescent;, as young adults; as young married people and perhaps parents. Our professional lives came later in development than our personal lives when we were growing up in a family or perhaps we were in a foster family among people we did not know. When we consider that our professional development occurred after perhaps the first two decades of our lives, we have not lived the professional life for a very long time. Therefore, it makes sense that we may not be finished in the first two or three years after we start our professional job, that we would like to have more information and preparation for varied and higher levels of understanding.

The search in professional development is a very satisfying one. It is worthwhile. The results can change one's personality to more energetic and purposeful levels. And all this results in helping many others who can benefit from your personal search.

For Further Reading

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.* New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1983.

Gardner, Howard. *Multiple Intelligences. The Theory in Practice.* New York: Basic Books, 1993.

Seligman, E. P. Martin. *Learned Optimism.* New York: Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1990.

Seligman, Martin E. P. *The Optimistic Child.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995